About The Book of Mormon

Commentary by Rick Grunder

Binding and Collation

Joseph Smith
The Book of Mormon

Palmyra, 1830

The Book of Mormon has generally come to most people as a surprise: to the farm boy beckoned from his sleep by an angel in the 1820s, to critics astonished that anyone would take the work seriously, and to millions of readers professing a personal witness that the book is not only authentic, but divine. It is unavoidably controversial and enigmatic, and if hundreds of millions of people have heard of this text, relatively few have examined it long enough to form an original opinion of what it may actually be.

"I read all day," recalled one Mormon pamphleteer of his first exposure to the book in 1830: "eating was a burden, I had no desire for food;… when the night came,… I preferred reading to sleep. As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true, as plainly and manifestly as a man comprehends and knows that he exists."[1] Brigham Young was slower to decide, but after nine

1. Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985), 18.

readings of the lengthy tome,[2] he, too, was fully converted by 1832.[3] "The language seemed to me very strange," recalled one of Young's brothers of an attempt to expose the "delusion" in 1830, "… but to my surprise I could not find the errors I anticipated, but felt a conviction that the book was true."[4]

Being *true* was a primary aspiration of this work even before its first publication in 1830, and the title page itself disclaimed, "if there be fault, it be the mistake of men; wherefore condemn not the things of God…." Such admonition was warranted by the circumstances, and is repeated by scholars defending the book to the present day. So extraordinary were the claims associated with the origins of the text – and so vague the explanation given in the author's preface – that it required individual leaps of faith to transform this ordinary calf-bound volume into a major canon of scripture.

As this Octavo CD-ROM goes into production, there are more than ten million Mormons worldwide, nearly half of them in the United States: one American in fifty. Most of them have never seen this cornerstone of their religion as it was first published to the world. Yet, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (based in Salt Lake City), the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Independence, Missouri) and some fifty smaller independent denominations all rely on the Book of Mormon to varying degrees for portions of their theology and as evidence of the prophetic character of their founder. When one contemplates the significance of the Shakers, the Millerites, the New Harmony Movement, or the Oneida Community, it is startling to note how one contemporary innovative group – the Mormons – not only thrives, but continues to expand in numbers and in cultural and political significance today.

Clearly, it takes more than a book to build a religion or a culture, and in the history of American printing, few productions have shown less initial promise for legend and influence than the volume now at hand. In simplest terms, the Book of Mormon purports to be a prophetically translated religious history of early Christian nations in the western hemisphere ranging from about 600 B.C. to 421 A.D., plus a brief account of civilizations living there much earlier – all arising from ancient emigrations of small groups from the Holy Land. It is essentially didactic in nature rather than technically detailed, and reads in archaic style reminiscent of the King James Bible.[5]

Its origins are as disputed as its historical authenticity. The text was dictated by Joseph Smith, Jr. (1805-44), the son of a farmer living near the village of Palmyra, New York. Smith spoke of an angel who appeared to him several times one September night, showing him clear visions where ancient metal tablets of gold had been buried fourteen centuries earlier in a nearby hill. He said that these were accompanied by

2. William E. Berrett, *Teachings of the Book of Mormon,… A Course of Study for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1962), 1.
3. *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801-1844*, ed. Elden Jay Watson (Salt Lake City: privately published; printed by Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), 1-2.
4. Ibid. Account by Phinehas Howe Young in the introduction, xviii-xix.
5. A Latter-day Saint scholar once estimated that some 17,000 words in the Book of Mormon (out of 264,000) come "from the King James translation of the Bible" because of extensive quoting, albeit ostensibly from independent ancient sources; see Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions…* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 207.

supernatural stones, or spectacles – indeed the high priestly *Urim* and *Thummim* of the Old Testament (as the story became formalized) – which allowed a worthy person to work out the translation of the ancient engravings on the golden plates.

This translating began haltingly in early 1828 in northeastern Pennsylvania, where Smith and his wife lived near her family. The project almost ended that summer when the first 116 pages of manuscript were stolen while on somewhat casual display in Palmyra. They were presumably taken by disgruntled friends or family of Martin Harris, a middle-aged, well-to-do Palmyra farmer who was spending considerable time and resources writing for the twenty-one-year-old prophet in Pennsylvania. Mortified at the loss, Smith did not attempt a re-dictation of the purloined material, for we read in the preface of the first edition that "Satan had put it into their hearts to tempt the Lord their God, by altering the words, that they did read contrary from that which I translated and caused to be written…" (p.[iii]).

It was not until Oliver Cowdery, a young schoolteacher, appeared in April of the following year that the text of the actual Book of Mormon was put to paper. "Our minds being now enlightened," Smith later recounted, "we began to have the Scriptures laid open to our understandings, and the true meaning and intention of their more mysterious passages revealed unto us, in a manner which we never could attain to previously, nor ever before had thought of."[6] In early June, Smith and Cowdery moved from Harmony, Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania to the farm of a Pennsylvania Dutch family named "Whitmer" living in Fayette, New York, which is situated in Seneca County between the two largest Finger lakes. The work was finished in a month: the entire Book of Mormon, nearly 600 octavo pages, had been set down in less than ninety days.

Smith and his friends who were closest to the translation differed when it came to describing his technique; the exact process seems to have varied over a period of time. We read of a curtain hung between Smith and early scribes, who were not allowed to view the ancient plates. We also read of a "seer" stone placed in a hat to which Smith pressed his face to obscure the light, dictating without benefit of curtain or tablets anywhere in evidence.

Shortly before the book was completed, it made allusion to three witnesses who might see the artifacts. Accordingly, on the recto of the final leaf appears the undated joint testimony of Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, declaring "with words of soberness, that an Angel of God came down from heaven, and he brought and laid before our eyes, that we beheld and saw the plates, and the engravings thereon; and…we beheld and bear record that these things are true; and it is marvellous in our eyes…." On the verso of the leaf, the names of eight additional witnesses are subscribed to an undated statement "… that Joseph Smith, Jr. the Author and Proprietor of this work, has shewn unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated, we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings

6. Pp.110 and 548; 2 Nephi 27:12 and Ether 5:2-4 in modern editions (*i.e.*, editions published by the LDS [Utah] Church as divided into verses and shorter chapters by Orson Pratt beginning with the Liverpool, 1879 edition).

thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work, and of curious workmanship." Of these eight men, four were Whitmers, one a Whitmer in-law, and the remainder, brothers and father of Joseph Smith.

Behind the book stood a relatively unlettered, non-pious young prophet with more native intelligence than sophistication. There were many local detractors, but Smith convinced associates that he dictated the very words of Jesus. He received a regular stream of revelations throughout his life, including the period when the Book of Mormon was being written. He had a charisma that went beyond appearance or personality.

Early in 1831, Mary Rollins and her mother went to visit the Smith residence after the Mormon relocation to Kirtland, Ohio. "We had heard so much about the Golden Bible, as it was then called," she remembered,

> that we were very anxious to hear more. The whole Smith family, excepting Joseph, was there. As we stood talking to them, Brother Joseph and Martin Harris came in with two or three others. When the greetings were over, Brother Joseph looked around very solemnly (it was the first time some of them had ever seen him) and said, "There are enough here to hold a little meeting."
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> A board was put across two chairs to make seats. Martin Harris sat on a little box at Joseph's feet. They sang and prayed, then Joseph got up to speak. He began very solemnly and very earnestly; all at once his countenance changed and he stood mute. He turned so white, he seemed perfectly transparent. Those who looked at him that night said he looked like he had a searchlight within him. I never saw anything like it on earth. I could not take my eyes away from him. I remember I thought we could almost see the bones through the flesh of his face.
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> I shall remember him as he looked then as long as I live.
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> He stood some moments looking over the congregation, as if to pierce each heart, then said, "Do you know who has been in your midst this night?"
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> One of the Smiths said, "An angel of the Lord."
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> Martin Harris said, "It was our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."
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> Joseph put his hand down on Martin's head and said,
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> "The Spirit of God revealed that to thee. Yes, brothers and sisters, the Savior has been in your midst this night, and I want you all to remember it. There is a veil over your eyes, for you could not endure to look upon him. You must be fed with milk not with strong meat. I want you all to remember this as if it were the last thing that escapes my lips. He has given you all to me, and commanded me to seal you up to everlasting life, that where he is there you may be also. And if you are tempted of Satan say, 'Get behind me Satan, for my salvation is secure.' " Then he knelt down and prayed. And such a prayer, I never heard before or since. We all felt that he was talking to the Lord and that the Spirit of the Lord rested down on the congregation.[7]

It was one thing to convince those who wanted to believe,

7. Mary E. Rollins Lightner, *Young Woman's Journal* 16 (Salt Lake City, 1905), 556-57.

quite another to persuade a printer to publish a lengthy work so unconventional as the Book of Mormon. A logical choice was Egbert Bratt Grandin, publisher of the *Wayne Sentinel* newspaper in Palmyra, and a former local farm boy born the year after Smith.[8] Although the Book of Mormon was not written in Palmyra, Joseph Smith's parents and siblings lived nearby, as did Martin Harris, Joseph's financial backer.

When Grandin refused the job, Harris accompanied Smith to Rochester, a thriving canal town with several printers. Thurlow Weed, a prominent newspaper publisher, remembered Smith visiting the office of his *Rochester Anti-Masonic Enquirer*[9] twice in three days, the second time with Harris, who offered himself as security for the cost. "I thought the man either crazed or a very shallow impostor," Weed later recalled of Smith, "and therefore declined to become a publisher, thus depriving myself of whatever notoriety might have been achieved by having my name imprinted upon the title-page of the first Mormon Bible."[10]

Printing could be a risky business; both Grandin and Weed faced libel suits that very year.[11] However, Elihu F. Marshall, another Rochester publisher of books and newspapers,[12] seems to have worked up a matter-of-fact estimate for printing and binding the book, and agreed to Harris' promised security.[13] On this basis, Smith and Harris were able to go back to Egbert Grandin in Palmyra, point out that the book was to be published anyway, and insist that they would rather he take the job, conveniently located as he was to their residences from where they might travel frequently to squire the work through the press.[14] Upon the advice of friends, including even Harris' disgruntled wife,[15] Grandin agreed.

After that agreement was reached (evidently in late June 1829), Joseph Smith needed to go back into the village to sign the contract. His mother stated that a friendly doctor came to the Smith home that morning to warn that a crowd of forty men was waiting to waylay him along the three-mile walk. "When he came to this field," according to the story, "he found the mob seated on the string of fence running along the road." Lifting his hat, Smith greeted each man cheerfully by name, completely disarming the lot,

> leaving them perched upon the fence, like so many roosting chickens, and arrived at Palmyra without being molested. Here he met Mr. Grandin, and writings were drawn

8. Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents*. Vol. I (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 90 n.77.
9. Weed names the *Rochester Telegraph* in his autobiography (below), but by 1829 he was publishing the *Anti-Masonic Enquirer* according to Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer, New York State, 1785-1830* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 306. Weed's old newspaper, now the *Rochester Daily [Advertiser and] Telegraph*, had been taken over by his former partner, Robert Martin (Hamilton, 285), who opposed Weed's antimasonic activities.
10. *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed, Edited by his Daughter Harriet A. Weed* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1883), 359.
11. Hamilton, *Country Printer,* 316; Grandin won his case and Weed had to pay damages of $400.
12. Ibid., 285; Marshall appears to have published newspapers in Rochester between 1825 and 1840, but with a hiatus in 1828-38 (evidently concentrating on books and almanacs, based on examples I have seen).
13. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism. Biography of its Founders and History of its Church. Personal Remembrances and Historical Collections Hitherto Unwritten.* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1867), 52.
14. Ibid., 52.
15. Ibid., 54.

up between them to this effect: That half of the price for printing was to be paid by Martin Harris, and the residue by my two sons, Joseph and Hyrum. These writings were afterwards signed by all the parties concerned.[16]

In fact, Harris would ultimately assume the full burden, and sell his farm to pay off the note. For the price of $3,000, five thousand copies would be printed and bound. By contrast, a small-town theological printing of that era might typically run, perhaps, a thousand copies, with some held back from the binder until successful sales were assured. This was a massive undertaking, at a huge expense, equal to a common laborer's wages for many years.

As soon as the manuscript was completed, Oliver Cowdery prepared a second, printer's copy, probably in response to Smith's experience with the initial 116 pages lost the previous year. The understandable paranoia was described years later by Grandin's colleague,[17] Pomeroy Tucker:

> In the beginning of the printing the Mormons professed to hold their manuscripts as "sacred," and insisted upon maintaining constant vigilance for their safety during the progress of the work, each morning carrying to the printing-office the instalment required for the day, and withdrawing the same at evening….Very soon… – after some ten days – the constant vigilance by the Mormons over the manuscripts was relaxed by reason of the confidence they came to repose in the printers.[18]

Five years later, Cowdery would reminisce about those "days never to be forgotten – to sit under the sound of a voice dictated by the *inspiration* of heaven… Day after day I continued, uninterrupted, to write from his mouth, as he translated, with the *Urim* and *Thummim*, or, as the Nephites whould [sic] have said, 'Interpreters,' the history or record, called 'The Book of Mormon.'"[19] Cowdery was the more literary of the two men, but he appears not to have interposed his talents where they were not invited, as became clear on the first day of printing:

> No alteration from copy in any manner was to be made. These things were "strictly commanded," as they said. Mr. John H. Gilbert, as printer, had the chief operative trust of the type-setting and press-work of the job. After the first day's trial he found the manuscripts in so very imperfect a condition, especially in regard to grammar, that he became unwilling further to obey the "command," and so announced to Smith and his party; when, finally, upon much friendly expostulation, he was given a limited discretion in correcting, which was exercised in the particulars of syntax, orthography, punctuation, capitalizing, paragraphing, etc. Many errors under these heads, nevertheless, escaped correction, as appear in the first edition of the printed book.[20]

Gilbert himself, writing more than sixty years after the fact,

16. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith*… (Liverpool: Published for Orson Pratt by S. W. Richards; London: Sold at the Latter-day Saints' Book Depôt, 1853), 142.
17. Hamilton, *Country Printer,* 303-04, shows Tucker printing the *Wayne Sentinel* from 1823-55, but not connected with that paper in 1827-34. However, he was a sometime business partner with John H. Gilbert, the typesetter whose independent testimony corroborates Tucker's recollections quoted here.
18. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress*, 53-54.
19. *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* I (October 1834), 14.
20. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress*, 53.

claimed to have "a very accurate and faithful" recollection of events connected with this printing. He remembered Martin Harris as the prime agent who convinced Grandin to take the job. "Joseph Smith, Jr.," he said, "had nothing to do whatever with the printing or furnishing copy for the printers, being but once in the office during the printing of the Bible, and then not over 15 or 20 minutes."[21] Smith's wife still lived near her parents in Pennsylvania, where he joined her during most of the production work, which lasted from August 1829 to late March 1830. Gilbert recorded the following technical details when he was ninety years old:

> A few pages of the manuscript were submitted as a specimen of the whole, and it was said there would be about 500 pages.
>
> The size of the page was agreed upon, and an estimate of the number of ems in a page, which would be 1000, and that a page of manuscript would make more than a page of printed matter, which proved to be correct.
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> The contract was to print and bind with leather, 5000 copies for $3,000. Mr. Grandin got a new font of Small Pica, on which the body of the work was printed. When the printer was ready to commence work, Harris was notified, and Hyrum Smith [Joseph's older brother] brought the first installment of manuscript, of 24 pages, closely written on common foolscap paper – he had it under his vest, and vest and coat closely buttoned over it. At night Smith came and got the manuscript, and with the same precaution carried it away…. [T]his was kept up for several days. The title page was first set up, and after proof was read and corrected, several copies were printed for Harris and his friends….[22]
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> After working a few days, I said to [Hyrum] Smith on his handing me the manuscript in the morning; "Mr. Smith, if you would leave this manuscript with me, I would take it home with me at night and read and punctuate it."… For two or three nights I took it home with me and read it, and punctuated it with a lead pencil….
>
> Martin Harris, Hyrum Smith and Oliver Cowdery were very frequent visitors to the office during the printing of the Mormon Bible. The manuscript was supposed to be in the handwriting of Cowdery. Every Chapter, if I remember correctly, was one solid paragraph, without a punctuation mark, from beginning to end.
>
> Names of persons and places were generally capitalized, but sentences had no end. The character or short &, was

21. "Memorandum, made by John H. Gilbert, Esq." in Wilford C. Wood, *Joseph Smith Begins His Work*, Vol. I (Salt Lake City: privately published; lithographed by Publishers Press, 1958), unnumbered preliminary pages [xxix-xxxi]; selections referenced here from pp. [xxix and xxx], respectively. Gilbert's lengthy "Memorandum" statement is dated Palmyra, September 8, 1892, and was apparently given "to accompany the photographs of 'Mormon Hill,' which have been made for the purpose of exhibits at the World's Fair in 1893." Wood gives no background, provenance, or location for the document, although it is likely in the fabulous Wood collection still in private hands in Utah. A manuscript shorter version of this statement signed by Gilbert is pasted into an 1830 Book of Mormon at the Ambrose Swasey Library, Colgate Theological Seminaries, Rochester, New York, and I have no reason to doubt the authenticity of either.
22. Gilbert, "Memorandum," [xxix].

used almost invariably where the word and, occurred, except at the end of a chapter. I punctuated it to make it read as I supposed the Author intended, and but very little punctuation was altered in proof-reading. The Bible was printed 16 pages at a time, so that one sheet of paper made two copies of 16 pages each, requiring 2500 sheets of paper for each form of 16 pages. There were 37 forms of 16 pages each, – 570 pages in all.[23]

It is strange that Gilbert missed the pagination of the book in his statement, as he owned a complete set of unbound sheets.[24] There were actually 590 pages and one leftover blank leaf (37 x 16 = 592, explaining why an absolutely complete copy has two blank leaves in the front, counting endpapers, but *three* at the back). The book is thus octavo, of thirty-seven gatherings, the signatures designated on the first leaf of each gathering in ordinary Arabic numerals, and on the second leaf with the same number followed by an asterisk. Pagination includes four preliminary leaves: [i]-iv (title, copyright and preface, p. iv mis-numbered "vi" in many copies); [5]-588 (the "ancient" text); and [2] ("The Testimony of Three Witnesses" and, on the verso, "And Also the Testimony of Eight Witnesses").

The testimony leaf at the end is an integral and essential part of a complete copy. A notion perpetuated in some commentaries that this leaf constitutes an additional feature or selling point must have been started by someone unfortunate enough to have obtained an incomplete example. The later rare four-page index found in some examples formed no part of the original printing. Sufficient typographical errors occurred to allow for a large variety of gathering combinations, to none of which has been assigned chronological precedence or distinction of relative rarity. It is enough to find any example in good condition!

A typical copy measures approximately 7 1/2 inches (19 cm.) in height. The binding is ordinary calf, with a leather label on the simple gilt-banded spine. Something occurred in the binding process which left an unusual large diamond-shaped crease pattern through the title page and outer leaves of many copies. A hint of mass production shows in original 1830 leather patches frequently used to fill blemishes in the Book of Mormon's covers, pressed smooth and relatively unobtrusive. Some bindings survive in a condition which displays beautiful "tree calf"-like swirled patterns in the leather, resembling the burl of fine hardwood furniture.

The three-story Grandin building still stands on the north side of Main Street in downtown Palmyra, restored by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The original single-pull Smith press on which Grandin's crew apparently did the printing is owned by the Church in Salt Lake City. The book was printed on the top floor, according to Gilbert, then passed to the second floor for binding – apparently contracted to Luther Howard,[25] a bookbinder formerly from Ithaca, New York, who was then starting up his own newspaper.[26] The

23. Ibid., [xxx].
24. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress*, 54; Wilford Wood eventually obtained the sheets in the mid-twentieth century. See illustrations in Wood, unnumbered preliminary pp. [xxii-iv].
25. Gilbert, "Memorandum," [xxx].
26. Hamilton, *Country Printer,* 279.

ground floor was the bookstore, where some of the first copies of the Book of Mormon were offered for sale according to an ad dated March 26, 1830, in Grandin's newspaper.[27]

The first examples of Book of Mormon text actually published were by Abner Cole, proprietor of a local satirical rag, *The Reflector*, published in Palmyra under the name of "O[badiah]. Dogberry, Esq." By the time Joseph Smith was able to stop the printing, three issues had come out with text pirated from the Grandin office (January 2, 13, and 22, 1830).[28] Issues of the *Reflector* are essentially unobtainable, and the book itself is highly prized by collectors and institutions fortunate enough to find and afford an example.

When a book is a foundation stone of faith, it will always be more than a collector's item. As with many other famous books, this volume's relatively nondescript mien belies the prominence which it would shortly attain. Unpretentious in appearance, the Book of Mormon disappears comfortably on the shelf between other books of similar time and place until some unsuspecting browser turns the front board to reveal the famous title. There were works of equally imposing claim, of course, even in nineteenth-century America,[29] and it would be unproductive to insist that this book is unique. Indeed, much of the Book of Mormon speaks not merely from its own era, but from its own decade and the very counties from which it emerged. This I have verified over the years in hundreds of texts examined and transcribed from the immediate world and culture of Joseph Smith. So when I point out that the Book of Mormon also has its exceptional moments, readers of all persuasions may allow that surprises wait between its leaves.

The actual panorama of the Book of Mormon is too complex to consider here. Extensive commentaries, exegeses, and polemical arguments over this one piece of Americana abound. Many passages in the book are tedious and awkward, some of its stories extravagant and simplistic. Its opening verse is a grammatical nightmare, its formulaic expressions legion and affected. Some of its doctrinal statements seem to jump from the pages of published theological publications of

27. Described in the ad in the *Wayne County Sentinel* as "about 600 pages, large Duodecimo,… now for sale, wholesale and retail, at the Palmyra Bookstore, by Howard & Grandin."
28. Chad J. Flake, *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830-1930* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1978), entry 6843.
29. Particularly literalist examples which come to mind are *The Christian Economy. Translated from the Original Greek, of an Old Manuscript, Found in the Island of Patmos, Where St. John Wrote his Book of the Revelations* (a pseudoepigraphic scripture evidently fabricated in the eighteenth century and published in some fifteen editions in England and America between 1760 and 1841); Richard Brothers, *A Revealed Knowledge of the Prophecies and Times… Wrote Under the Direction of The Lord God, And Published by His Sacred Command; It Being the First Sign of Warning for the Benefit of All Nations. Containing, with other Great and Remarkable Things, Not Revealed to any other Person on Earth, the Restoration of the Hebrews to Jerusalem, in the Year 1798; Under their Revealed Prince and Prophet Richard Brothers* (West Springfield, MA: Printed by Edward Gray. For Asaph Chilson of Buckland, and to be sold by said Chilson by the dozen or single, 1797, among numerous British and American editions); Daniel Hawley, *Hawley's Millennium; Declaring the Restoration of the Hebrews into the Holy Land; And Many Infallible Proofs of the Prophetical Doctrine; And of the Divinity, Doctrine, and Passions, of Jesus Christ the Mediator, and of the Apostles: And Containing the Principles of a Perpetual Self-Moving Engine…* (New York: Printed and Sold for the Author, by George Forman, 1818); Philemon Stewart, *A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book; from the Lord God of Heaven, to the Inhabitants of Earth: Revealed in the United Society at New Lebanon…* (Canterbury, NH: Printed in the United Society [of Shakers], 1843).

the time, with warnings and contentions ringing suspiciously similar to other books, letters, and pamphlets produced in that environment. Early reviewers took this for granted. The primitivist debater Alexander Campbell complained:

> This prophet Smith, through his stone spectacles, wrote… in his book of Mormon, every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies;… How much more benevolent and intelligent this American apostle than were the holy Twelve and Paul…[30]

Affecting even less surprise, the Harvard-trained Unitarian, Jason Whitman, reviewed the Book of Mormon at the beginning of 1834, and observed that it was "with some art adapted to the known prejudices of a portion of the community."[31] "If you object to the historical accounts of their sacred books," Whitman reported of some Mormons,

> they refer you to the mounds of the western country, as remains of ancient cities, and as proofs that this country was once inhabited by a race of people better acquainted with the arts of civilized life, than the present race of savages; and this, they contend, is satisfactory presumptive proof of the truth of the history.[32]

But if this were the sum and meaning of the Book of Mormon, we would not preserve and examine its every jot & tittle on CD-ROM today. There is more here than re-worked theology and theories of Native American origins. To dismiss the work as a mere imposture – or its adherents as a cult – would indulge reductionism to a degree sufficient to exclude all but Shakespeare from the halls of literature, or leave only the most frightening fundamentalists on their way to a literalist heaven of narrow, unimaginative bliss. It was not simply doctrine or tenuous anthropological theories which captured the devotion of millions of adherents over the years, nor is its American Jesus and salvation sufficient to explain the appeal of this book to converts worldwide today.

The exertion of this perplexing text is at times relieved by flashes of brilliance – sometimes sustained, often surprising. Some of its nicest phrases reflect a seldom-suppressed optimism which brightened the personality of Joseph Smith. "Adam fell, that men might be," we read on page 65, "and men are, that they might have joy."[33] The book is irrefutably Christian by any reasonable standard, and makes much of Christianity contemplated in the New World long before the birth of Jesus, whether as a man of flesh and blood foreseen as he would appear incarnate,[34] or in this intriguing vision by the earliest protagonist of the book in the sixth century B.C.

> And it came to pass that I saw the Heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he saith unto me, Nephi, what beholdest thou? And I saith unto him, a virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins. And he saith unto me, Knowest thou the condescention of God? And I said unto him, I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all

30. "Delusions." *The Millennial Harbinger* II:2 (February 7, 1831), 93.
31. *The Unitarian* I (January 1834), 47.
32. Ibid., 46.
33. 2 Nephi 2:25 in modern editions.
34. P. 544; Ether 3:16 in modern editions.

things. And he said unto me, Behold, the virgin which thou seest, is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh.

And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the spirit; and after that she had been carried away in the spirit for the space of a time, the angel spake unto me, saying, look! And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things. And he spake unto me, saying, Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.[35]

The book ranges from the sublime to the specific, even to such detail as the communion prayer still recited in many languages by thousands of Mormon priests worldwide, dictated by a farm boy in 1829:

O God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son, and witness unto thee, O God the Eternal Father, that they are willing to take upon them the name of thy Son, and always remember him, and keep his commandments which he hath given them, that they may always have his spirit to be with them. Amen.[36]

Yet for all its concern over doctrine, the Book of Mormon is hardly the theological basis for Mormonism that most casual readers might suppose. Do not look here for clear exposition of the Latter-day Saint view of the nature of Deity, eternal human origins, or elevation beyond mortal attainments to actual godhood and private creation of worlds. Some distinguishing "Mormon" beliefs generally recognizable to most people hardly find origin or place in the earliest Mormon book. Despite involved consideration of the atonement and salvation, for example, there is no mention there of the well-known Latter-day Saint spiritual work for the dead, seen in extensive genealogical research and the Mormon temples. Readers who know that faithful Mormons refuse even a drop of alcoholic drink will find no such wholesale prohibition in The Book of Mormon. And polygamy – practically synonymous with Western Mormonism until this century – has been positively abhorred and forbidden in all editions of the book from 1830 to the present day.[37] Later nineteenth-century readers of a four-page list of textual references inserted in some copies of the

35. Ibid., 24-25; 1 Nephi 11:14-23 in modern editions.
36. Ibid., 575; Moroni 4:3 in modern editions.
37. "But the word of God burthens me because of your grosser crimes. For behold, thus saith the Lord: This People begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the Scriptures: for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his Son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord. Wherefore, thus saith the Lord: I have led this people forth out of the land of Jerusalem, by the power of mine arm, that I might raise up unto me a righteous branch, from the fruit of the loins of Joseph. Wherefore, I, the Lord God, will not suffer that this people shall do like unto them of old. Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: for there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none: For I, the Lord God, delighteth in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me: thus saith the Lord of Hosts." Pp.126-27; Jacob 2:23-8 in modern editions.

first edition must have raised their eyebrows at the topic highlighted for page 127: "More than one wife forbidden."

The Book of Mormon illustrated in this Octavo CD-ROM is exceptional not only for its fine condition, but in its inclusion of this later "index," as it is generally called. Entitled, "References to the Book of Mormon," this is essentially a table of contents, filling approximately 3 1/5 pages on two leaves roughly equal in height to the pages of the book itself. The text is arranged in two columns, comprised of topics beneath individual "book" headings, listed in order of appearance. This is seldom seen, and little is known about its production. Dr. Peter Crawley, the preeminent Mormon bibliographer, points out typographic similarity between elements of the caption title and the title page of the Doctrine and Covenants, printed in 1835 at Kirtland, Ohio, on the press of the *Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate*. The page numbers listed in this "References" insert apply only to the 1830 Book of Mormon; the second edition would be printed during the winter of 1836-37, ending the window of likely time for the publishing of this obscure little imprint.[38]

Its potential interest, however, goes far beyond bibliographic curiosity. Central to many current scholarly investigations of Mormon origins are issues of original cultural setting, contemporary Mormon self-understanding, and early doctrinal interpretation. A surprising number of such points find referents among some 250 content headings chosen by the anonymous Latter-day Saint(s) who wrote this index. With less than one entry given for every two pages of the Book of Mormon text, it is interesting to note the topics that were singled out for this 1830s list.

Early nineteenth-century Universalist theology, for example, viewed by most Americans of that time as dangerously indulgent of sin, is characterized rather simplistically in certain Book of Mormon passages. Scholars defending literal Mormon claims point to a broad historical spectrum of such conflict, not limited to the time when the Book of Mormon was published, or to specific Universalist followings of Joseph Smith's era.[39] However, with subject entries like "Nehor the universalian. 221" and "Amlici the universalist. 224," the original Book of Mormon "References" sheet proves that some prominent Mormon(s) of the 1830s felt entirely comfortable with the parallel comparison.

Other subjects of immediate interest to first-edition readers might include the hardship of clearing forest land for cultivation ("Trees removed by faith. 130"), construction methods of the time requiring less timber ("Cement houses built. 412"), or

38. Conversation with Peter Crawley, April 2, 1998.
39. "Vogel has also discerned that Alma 21:6-9 is directed against the idea 'that God will save all men.' Here, Vogel at last has found two Book of Mormon passages directed against the idea of universal salvation. However, are they directed against early nineteenth-century Universalists? Perhaps yes in the broadest sense, in the same way certain Bible passages indicate that not everyone will be saved (see, e.g., Psalms 119:94; 18 Proverbs 28:18; Jeremiah 30:11; Ezekiel 36:29; Ephesians 5:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Peter 4:18). However, there is nothing in these Book of Mormon or Bible passages indicating that they are directed against nineteenth-century Universalists. Just as it is certain that these Bible passages were not written specifically to apply against nineteenth-century Universalists, so the Book of Mormon passages cited by Vogel were not discernibly directed towards the Universalist faith in the 1820s and 1830s." Martin S. Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1996), 418, reviewing Dan Vogel, "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon" in Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon; Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 21-52. Taken from Infobases *LDS Collectors Library '97* CD-ROM, not verified against hard copy.

communitarian movements then in vogue among Mormons and non-Mormons alike ("They had all things common. 507"; repeated for page 514). The American antimasonic movement (prevalent at the time Joseph Smith dictated the Book of Mormon) suggests itself in a number of the book's passages describing the intrigues of ancient American bands of robbers after the order of one Gadianton. While modern defenders may propose a complexity of such ancient bands in the Book of Mormon – against a supposed homogeneity of much later Freemasons[40] – we see that the writer of the Book of Mormon's first index lumped them together quite comfortably ("Gadianton the robber. 410" "The Gadianton band destroyed. 437" "The reappearance of the robbers. 438" "The Gadianton robbers again. 517"). The rare contents list of "References" to the Book of Mormon, then, serves as an anchor to remind sophisticated scholars of all persuasions that whatever they may see in the book today may not necessarily be what made it relevant to the first generation of adherents who secured its survival and success.

The Book of Mormon has always been larger than its text, however, a symbol of the nature of the Latter-day Saints. Its very existence proclaimed that there was a prophet on earth who could speak for God, answer crucial questions, and rally the people in a final Dispensation of the Fullness of Times. It stood as proof of divine authority and acceptance. It served as the ultimate proselyting tool, tangible evidence that Mormonism was not just another phenomenon of the "Burnt-Over District" of the Second Great Awakening. Here was substance in the face of derision, recourse in times of shocking persecution.

Neither Catholic nor Protestant by their own definition, Mormons believe in a sort of Transcendentalist's idealization

of primitivist American Christianity. Whatever parts of Smith's restoration movement may have been missed in the Book of Mormon were nonetheless enabled by its prophetic exuberance and very real physical existence which commenced in a Palmyra printing shop and continues to expand in numbers and languages today – including dialects so obscure as to require no more than a hundred copies in an edition. Normalizing throughout the present century to ever-increasing levels of respectability and compatibility with mainstream cultures, Mormonism in all its denominations still clings to the book which gave it its unofficial moniker. Is it not appropriate that the very name, "Mormon," comes from the character in the book who served as its compiler, editor, and redactor: the prophet who abridged the writings of his hemisphere for ultimate publication to Jew and Gentile ages after his death? It was his son (as the book claims) who buried the golden plates in the hill of a northern continent which would become the United States, a land lost to his own wicked generation, of which the depositor was left a final survivor to wander out solitary days. "And now I bid unto all, farewell" concludes the final verse of the book:

> I soon go to rest in the paradise of God, until my spirit and body shall again reunite, and I am brought forth triumphant through the air, to meet you before the pleasing bar of the great Jehovah, the Eternal Judge of both quick and dead.[41]

40. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 130-31.
41. P. 588; Moroni 10:34 in modern editions, where the redundant "again reunite" remains uncorrected.

As those who peruse this CD-ROM will see, the Book of Mormon is essentially a religious exhortation. Beyond studies of its origins or hints of chicanery, it is a free-standing icon liberated from constraints of the press. When the second edition was published, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery made more than a thousand changes.[42] The vast majority of these were typographical and grammatical, but some carried more import, the most notable clarifying a distinction between God, the Father, and the Son, Jesus Christ. Relevant passages from Nephi's vision of Mary (quoted above) now read, "Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of *the Son of* God… Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the *Son of the* Eternal Father!"[43] In another passage, an anachronistic attribution to a prophet already dead was changed to the name of that prophet's son,[44] even though this contradicted Cowdery's manuscript. A Mormon scholar later speculated that the error might have been committed anciently on the golden plates by Mormon himself.[45] Smith continued to make corrections in subsequent editions published during his lifetime. In an intriguing example of political correctness, he changed an important adjective in a prophecy regarding Native Americans of modern times. In the original and 1837 editions, the text was as follows:

> And the Gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers,… and many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and a delightsome people.[46]

In the 1840 edition ("Third Edition, carefully revised by the translator," Nauvoo, Illinois, stereotyped in Cincinnati), converted American Indians no longer needed to anticipate becoming "white," but simply, "pure." Some corrections were missed in the first European edition supervised by Brigham Young (Liverpool, 1841), yet that edition provided the basis for many subsequent editions of the Book which perpetuated the original "white and delightsome" phrase in the Utah Church until 1981.

Joseph Smith once said that "the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."[47] If this claim was ambitious, it was backed by energy to make the book even *more* correct. Seven weeks after his statement, Smith was "reading the Book of Mormon… American stereotype edition [1840]… for the purpose of correcting the stereotype plates of some errors which escaped notice in the first edition."[48] This would have been in preparation for the Nauvoo, 1842 edition, the last to be printed before he was murdered in the summer of 1844.

The printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon stayed with Oliver Cowdery, who became disaffected from Smith and his

42. This according to a Mormon defender, Dr. George Horton, "Understanding Textual Changes in the Book of Mormon," *Ensign; The Ensign of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 13 (December 1983), 26.
43. 1 Nephi 11:18, 21 in modern editions (italics added). Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions*… (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967),197.
44. "king Benjamin," p.200, line 24; in modern editions, "king Mosiah," Mosiah 21:28.
45. Sidney B. Sperry, *Answers to Book of Mormon Questions*… (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967), 203.
46. P. 117; cf. 2 Nephi 30:5-6 in modern editions.
47. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1978), IV:461 (November 28, 1841).
48. Ibid., IV:494 (January 15, 1842); see also pp. 500-01.

church. It passed to David Whitmer in Missouri, who also left the Saints but kept the copy as a sacred talisman against personal harm. It eventually ended up with the Reorganized Church and is preserved at Independence. Unfortunately, the original, dictated manuscript has not fared so well. What remains of it is in large part contained in a huge morocco slipcase in a vault of the Historical Department of the Church in Salt Lake City. Ebenezer Robinson, a friend of Smith, Cowdery, and Whitmer, recalled what happened in October 1841 at the laying of the cornerstone of Smith's "Mansion House" on Water Street in lower Nauvoo, Illinois, close to the Mississippi River:

> After the brethren had assembled at the southeast corner of the foundation, where the cornerstone was to be laid, President Joseph Smith said: "Wait, brethren, I have a document I wish to put in that stone," and started for his house, which was only a few rods away, across Main Street. I went with him to the house, and also one or two other brethren. He got a manuscript copy of the Book of Mormon, and brought it into the room where we were standing, and said: "I will examine to see if it is all here," and as he did so I stood near him, at his left side, and saw distinctly the writing, as he turned up the pages until he hastily went through the book and satisfied himself that it was all there, when he said: "I have [had] trouble enough with this thing," which remark struck me with amusement, as I looked upon it as a sacred treasure.[49]

Sealing the manuscript in the dank hollow of a stone kept it from view for forty years while much of it soaked to oblivion, but the age of advanced conservation (which is bringing some of the wadded pulp back to life as painstakingly as the Dead Sea Scrolls)[50] is also the day of databases for the masses. The Octavo 1830 Book of Mormon allows both scholarly bibliophiles and curious children to view, copy, print, and compare its every word and stylistic turn in excruciating detail, a century and a half after Joseph Smith's death. "Saints" and sinners alike are invited to this particular feast, where an American prophet's words can be scrutinized at leisure, strangely supporting the book's own prediction about tablets, and words, and the power of information:

> And behold, it hath been prophesied by our fathers, that they should be kept and handed down from one generation to another, and be kept and preserved by the hand of the Lord, until they should go forth unto every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, that they shall know of the mysteries contained thereon. And now behold, if they are kept, they must retain their brightness; yea, and they will retain their brightness; yea, and also shall all the plates which do contain that which is Holy Writ. Now ye may suppose that this is foolishness in me; but behold I say unto you, That by small and simple things, are great things brought to pass; and small means, in many instances, doth confound the wise.[51]

Rick Grunder

49. *The Return* II (August 1890), 314-15.
50. Royal Skousen, "Piecing Together the Original Manuscript," *BYU Today* 46 (May 1992), 18-24 (discussing the restoration of ms. fragments from the Wilford Wood collection). The bulk of the original manuscript is irretrievably lost. Skousen finds strong evidence that the books of 3 Nephi, Mormon, and portions of Helaman were set from the original, rather than the "printer's" manuscript, pp. 23-24.
51. P. 326; cf. Alma 37:4-6 in modern editions.

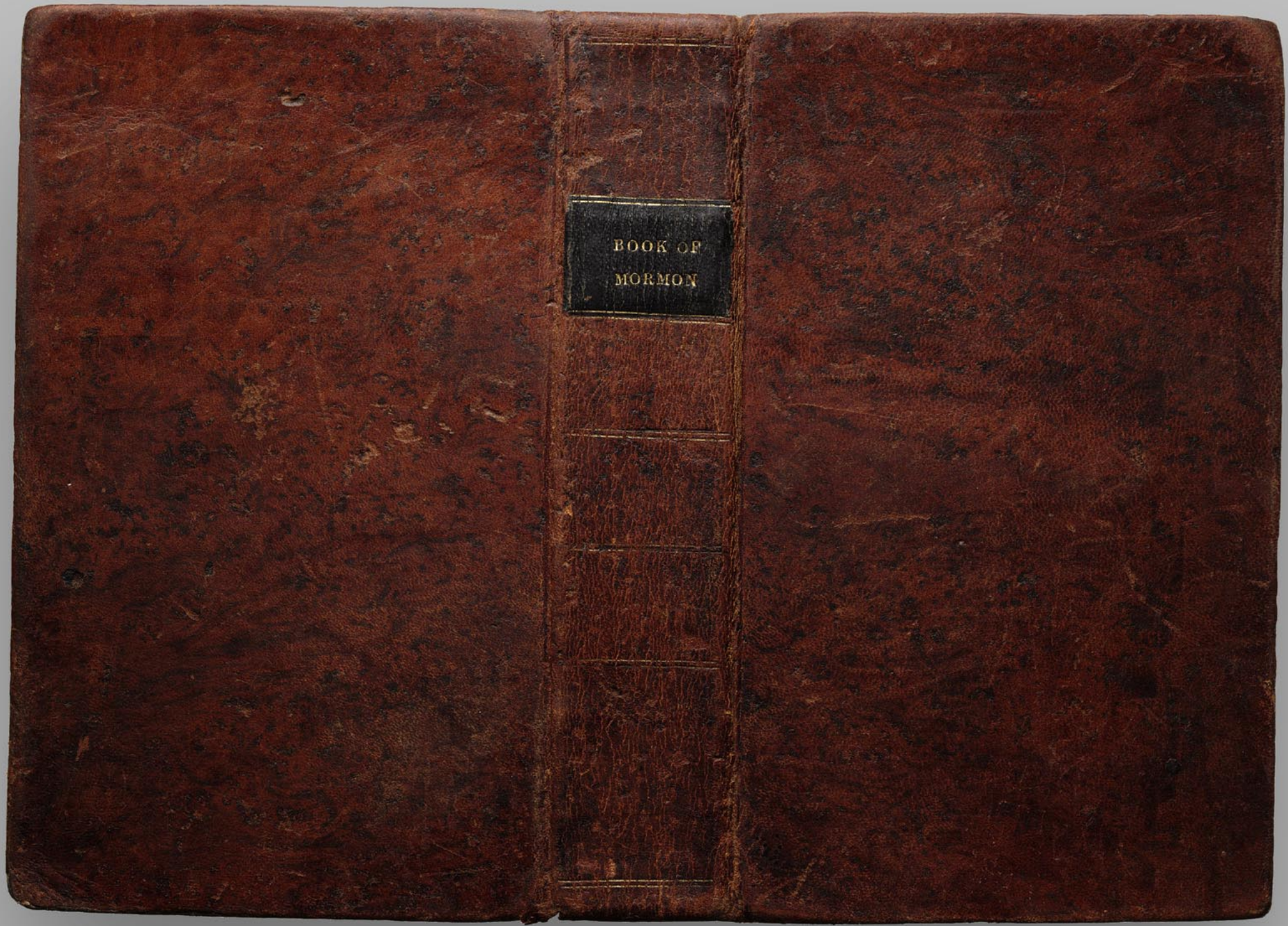
Rick Grunder, a great, great grand-nephew of Joseph Smith through plural marriage, is an antiquarian bookseller in Syracuse, New York. He holds an M.A. in history from Brigham Young University, where he served as Chairman of the Harold B. Lee Library Bibliographic Department until giving up his post to start his business in 1981. His sixty-five catalogs on Mormonism describe rare and collectible books, manuscripts, and artifacts relating to the origins of the movement.

The Book of Mormon Binding

The binding of The Book of Mormon is of contemporary American tree calf over pasteboards measuring 7 1/2 x 4 9/16 (190 x 116 mm). The front and back boards are plain, having no decoration. The smooth spine is divided into six panels by gold, double rules. The gilt title is on a black leather label in the second panel.

Click here to see binding

Collation: 8^0: 1-37^8 [$2 signed], 296 leaves, pp. [I-III] IV [5] 6-588 [589-592] [= 592], [misprinting 212 as 122].
Contents: **1 1**^{a}: title. **1 1**^{b}: copyright. **1 2**$^{a-b}$: preface. **1 3**^{a}**-37 6**^{b}: text. **37 7**^{a}: 'THE TESTIMONY OF THREE WITNESSES'. **37 7**^{b}: 'AND ALSO THE TESTIMONY OF EIGHT | WITNESSES.' **37 8**$^{a-b}$: blank. Two unnumbered leaves titled 'REFERENCES | TO THE | BOOK OF MORMON' tipped onto back cover pastedown.



Joseph Smith. The Book of Mormon. Palmyra, 1830. BRIDWELL LIBRARY

Octavo™

THE

BOOK OF MORMON:

AN ACCOUNT WRITTEN BY THE HAND OF MORMON, UPON PLATES TAKEN FROM THE PLATES OF NEPHI.

Wherefore it is an abridgment of the Record of the People of Nephi; and also of the Lamanites; written to the Lamanites, which are a remnant of the House of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile; written by way of commandment, and also by the spirit of Prophecy and of Revelation. Written, and sealed up, and hid up unto the LORD, that they might not be destroyed; to come forth by the gift and power of GOD unto the interpretation thereof; sealed by the hand of Moroni, and hid up unto the LORD, to come forth in due time by the way of Gentile; the interpretation thereof by the gift of GOD; an abridgment taken from the Book of Ether.

Also, which is a Record of the People of Jared, which were scattered at the time the LORD confounded the language of the people when they were building a tower to get to Heaven: which is to shew unto the remnant of the House of Israel how great things the LORD hath done for their fathers; and that they may know the covenants of the LORD, that they are not cast off forever; and also to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD, manifesting Himself unto all nations. And now if there be fault, it be the mistake of men; wherefore condemn not the things of GOD, that ye may be found spotless at the judgment seat of CHRIST.

BY JOSEPH SMITH, JUNIOR,
AUTHOR AND PROPRIETOR.

PALMYRA:
PRINTED BY E. B. GRANDIN, FOR THE AUTHOR.
1830.